PRELIMINARY REPORT ON OPERATION OF HOPPER DREDGES

IN THE FREEPORT HARBOR CHANNEL PROJECT

OCTOBER 2006 – FEBRUARY 2007

On October 7, 2006 the contract hopper dredge *Columbia* began work on the Entrance and Jetty Channels of the Freeport Harbor Project. Contract specifications required dredging an estimated 1,445,000 cubic yards (CY) of shoal material. The required depth of dredging was 49 feet below Mean Low Tide (MLT, Corps of Engineers Datum), with 2 feet of allowable overdepth dredging along the Entrance Channel and 47 feet MLT with 2 feet of overdepth along the Jetty Channel.

Dredging began on October 7, 2006, and was completed on February 20, 2007. Dredging operations were continuous during this time period. A total of 1,334 loads of dredged material were collected and deposited into Placement Area No. 1-A. Dredging was performed between Stations 95+67 along the Jetty Channel and (-)210+00 along the Outer Bar Channel. A total of about 2,516,000 CY of material was excavated from this project.

The dredges were initially equipped with rigid draghead turtle deflectors, and 100% inflow screening with a 4-inch square mesh. NMFS-approved turtle observers provided 24-hour/day monitoring of dragheads and screens for each load cycle. The observers were employed by East Coast Observers, Inc. and Coastwise Consulting under subcontract to the dredging contractor, B+B Dredging Co.

During the performance of this dredging, one loggerhead turtle take was experienced. This take occurred on November 14 in load 384. The surface water temperature was about 20.0°C. The observer reports are included in the enclosed CD.

Coordination was conducted with the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network (STSSN). There were no reports of stranded turtles that bore injuries consistent with a potential encounter with a hopper dredge.

Material dredged consisted mostly of mud and clay. Occasionally, the clay clogged the screens, but it didn't seem to present such a problem that the screen mesh size needed adjustment. Clogging that was experienced on this job also did not approach the level of difficulty frequently reported during previous dredging operations in this channel.